



Keeping Swindon **Safe**



Child Q: Safeguarding Practice Review

Conducted by City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership

[Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review – Child Q | chscp](#)

27/7/22: Developed by SSP Learning & Development Manager in consultation with Bernice Weiss, Lead Safeguarding Adviser - Education
Source: with thanks to Wirral Safeguarding Childrens Partnership.

1. What happened to Child Q? Child Q is Black Caribbean school girl who was 15 years old when she was strip searched by female police officers at her school in London in 2020. The strip search followed concerns expressed by teachers that Child Q was smelling strongly of cannabis and may be carrying drugs. When questioned before being searched Child Q denied having drugs in her possession and a search of her belongings revealed nothing significant. The search, which took place on school premises, but without an appropriate adult present exposed Child Q's intimate body parts, and she was also menstruating which was known to staff.

2. Referral and review. Child Q disclosed what had happened to her parents and they took her to the GP who contacted children's services. City and Hackney commissioned a Child Safeguarding Practice Review because of the traumatic impact of the strip search and the suggestion of racist motivations. One of the significant decisions to come under scrutiny was the absence of Child Q's parents being informed before the search and the absence of an appropriate adult. The police weren't challenged at the time by the school. The review highlighted the ambiguous guidance around this subject and, that there was a clear loss of focus on the welfare of the child.

3. Racism. The review evaluated the actions of professionals involved on the day of the strip search in the context of Child Q's ethnicity and whether she was treated differently because she is Black. The perception of Child Q and her family is that the search was racially motivated. The report concluded: *'the disproportionate decision to strip search Child Q is unlikely to have been disconnected from her ethnicity and her background as a child growing up on an estate in Hackney.'*

The review also highlights the presence of ['adultification bias'](#) - where children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are perceived as being more 'streetwise', less innocent and less vulnerable than other children.



6. Key questions.

- are agencies assured that they and their staff have 'safeguarding first' approach where the welfare of the child is always of paramount importance?
- are staff aware of 'adultification' and how their own bias can affect their practice and decision making?
- do agencies include anti-racist statements in their policies and procedures?
- do policies and procedures include children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities as vulnerable?
- are professionals aware of police powers in relation to stop and search and searches of children?

5. Recommendations. 14 recommendations were made which included:

- the need for clear unambiguous and up to date guidance about stop and search practices, and the conduct of searches, screening and confiscation.
- guidance about the requirements for an Appropriate Adult need to be similarly clear, especially when a child is going to be searched.
- the need to emphasise that the welfare of the child is always paramount in any situation and children's social care should always be contacted when there are safe-guarding concerns.
- the need for awareness raising programmes for schools and the community about police stop and search powers. the need for 'adultification' training.
- the need for local anti-racist charters.

4. Findings. There were 8 findings from the review:

- 1) The school was compliant with expected practice in responding to their concerns about Child Q smelling of cannabis.
- 2) However, the decision to strip search her was not in her best interests.
- 3) School staff deferred to the authority of the police without challenge.
- 4) School staff had insufficient focus on the safeguarding of Child Q.
- 5) The law and policy governing strip searches is ambiguous.
- 6) The absence of a specific requirement to seek parental consent undermines safeguarding.
- 7) Covid-19 restriction were a barrier to communication.
- 8) The family felt racism was a key factor.



7. Further information/useful resources

Read the review of Child Q: [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review – Child Q | chscp](#)

Stop and search/strip searches :

- ✓ [Stop and search | College of Policing](#)
- ✓ [Stop and search | Wiltshire Police](#)
- ✓ [Stop and search - Liberty \(libertyhumanrights.org.uk\)](#)
- ✓ [Child Q and the law on strip search \(parliament.uk\)](#)
- ✓ [Stop and Search | Youth Justice Legal Centre \(yjlc.uk\)](#)
- ✓ [Can I be searched at school – lawstuff.org.uk](#)
- ✓ [NASUWT | Searching, Screening and Confiscation Advice for Schools](#)

Adultification:

- ✓ [Adultification bias of black children: Q&A with Jahnine Davis \(farrer.co.uk\)](#)
- ✓ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/06/Academic-Insights-Adultification-bias-within-child-protection-and-safeguarding.pdf>
- ✓ [Boys to men: the cost of ‘adultification’ in safeguarding responses to Black boys in: Critical and Radical Social Work Volume 8 Issue 2 \(2020\) \(bristoluniversitypressdigital.com\)](#)
- ✓ [Adultification bias in child protection & safeguarding - Russell Webster](#)
- ✓ [Safeguarding children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities | NSPCC Learning](#)
- ✓ [Safeguarding children from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities | NSPCC Learning](#)

SSP resource exploitation and language – words matter

- ✓ [Language practice briefs for those at risk of exploitation - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

Children’s Commissioner report

- ✓ [Strip search of children by the Metropolitan Police Service - new analysis by the Children’s Commissioner for England | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

What is Adultification Bias?

- Happens when preconceptions held about children, lead to them being treated and perceived as being more 'adult-like' (Goff et al, 2014, Davis, J. and Marsh, N., 2020).
- If children are 'seen' as more adult-like, further assumptions may be made about a child, including the perception that they have more agency, autonomy, and choice, than they actually do. It is likely that these perceptions of children will transfer into the language used to describe them, affecting the ways in which they are supported and safeguarded by professionals.
- This disproportionately affects black boys as evidenced in a number of serious case reviews in recent years. It stems from bias and prejudice which perpetuates negative stereotypes and racism and can lead to significant safeguarding failures.
- This is reflective of other forms of discrimination and it is important for professionals to be aware of all biases and areas of systemic oppression which impact children's lives. These can be present in any workforce and organisations should ensure an intersectional and anti-oppressive approach is taken when working with and safeguarding children.
- This is discussed in the context of safeguarding black boys from exploitation in this [article](#) by Jahnine Davis and Nick Marsh and in the VKPP Spotlight Briefing: [Child Criminal Exploitation | Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme \(vkpp.org.uk\)](#).

In this short clip Jahnine Davis explains adultification bias. YouTube (March 2022).
Click to access the clip [Jahnine Davis explains the adultification bias after black schoolgirl strip searched by police - YouTube](#)
(Duration of the clip 1:55)





The information in the following slides is taken from the report:

Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding

Author Jahnine Davis
HM Inspectorate of Probation
Academic Insights 2022/06



Access the full report - [Academic Insights \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/academic-insights/)

Adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding

The application of adultification bias results in children's rights being diminished or ignored, with notions of innocence and vulnerability displaced by notions of responsibility and culpability.

In SCR Child C - Davis and Marsh (2020) define adultification as:





- 'The concept of adultification is when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.'
- There are various definitions of adultification, all relate to a child's personal characteristics, socio-economic influences and/or lived experiences. Regardless of the context in which adultification take place, the impact results in children's rights being either diminished or not upheld.'

Read the Serious case review: Child C [full overview report] Published by [City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) (2020). This can be accessed in the [NSPCC library catalogue](#)



Adultification can happen within various contexts

While research indicates that Black children are most likely to experience adultification bias, it is important to understand the differing contexts in which it can feature, which places all children at risk of this discrimination.



However, this should not mean a shifting of focus from Black children but instead a curiosity to understand how race/ethnicity and other aspects of a child's identity compounds these different contexts.

Adultification in other contexts

Domestic abuse

With limited support the non-abusive parent may seek support from the child/children.

The child may feel a sense of responsibility to take care of their siblings, and the professional network may view this child as being more resilient and 'streetwise.'

However, the potential implications is the vulnerability of the child being overlooked, leaving them at more risk and the child left to presume a forced sense of independence.

Further information: [Battered Women's Views of Their Children - DEBRA LYNN STEPHENS, 1999 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

Adultification in other contexts

Socio-economic disadvantage

'social economic deprivation' may influence how children living in poverty may be expected to support the family purse and take on responsibilities which would normally be for adult parent and carers to hold.

It is important to note that these responsibilities are not relating to 'chores for pocket money' and to support life skills, but instead a reliance and lack of choice to support the reproduction of income due to parental stresses and limited resource.

Further information: [Burton, L. \(2007\). 'Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model', Family Relations, 56, pp. 329–345.](#)

Adultification in other contexts

Transphobia

cisgender biases and oppressions lead to hostile attitudes towards transgender children. Consequently, overlooking the basic needs all children require, such as warmth, care, love and belonging (Maslow, 1943).

Transgender girls are adultified by positioning them as presenting as adult like and as 'immutably gendered, confused and sexually predatory', where the needs of children become neglected.

Further information: [Stone, A. \(2017\). 'Gender panics about transgender children in religious right discourse.' Journal of LGBT Youth.](#)

Adultification in other contexts

Homelessness

Children at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, may be without choice but to adopt early 'adult like roles'.

Subsequently, professionals may not always consider the impact of children having to assume adult like roles, without ample time to transition to adulthood

Further information: [Schmitz, R. and Tyler, K. \(2016\). 'Growing up before their time: The early adultification experiences of homeless young people', Children and Youth Services Review,](#)

[Jurkovic., G. \(1997\). Lost Childhoods: the Plight of the Parentified Child. New York: Routledge.](#)

Adultification in other contexts

Young carers may feel 'overwhelmed in addition to their other life responsibilities'

Further information: [Schmitz, R. and Tyler, K. \(2016\). 'Growing up before their time: The early adultification experiences of homeless young people', Children and Youth Services Review.](#)

Unaccompanied minors may also experience adultification bias and care experienced children.

Further information: [Puig, M. \(2002\). 'The Adultification of Refugee Children', Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment.](#)